

4 · Rūmī and *waḥdat al-wujūd*

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Few technical terms of Sufism are as well known as *waḥdat al-wujūd*, “Oneness of Being” or “Unity of Existence.” Though this expression has historical connections with the school of Ibn al-ʿArabī, it is sometimes employed to refer to the views of other Sufis, including figures who lived long before Ibn al-ʿArabī.¹ It has also been said that Rūmī supported *waḥdat al-wujūd*, but if this statement is taken to mean that Rūmī derived the idea from Ibn al-ʿArabī or his students, serious historical and intellectual questions arise. In order to understand these questions, one needs a clear idea of the meaning of the term *waḥdat al-wujūd*.

Tawḥīd

The expression *waḥdat al-wujūd* is built from two words – *waḥda* and *wujūd* – both of which were important for Islamic thought from early times. Islamic theory and practice is grounded in the *shahāda* or the giving witness that “There is no god but God,” an expression often called *kalimat al-tawḥīd*, the “statement through which God’s Unity is declared.” The basic sense of *tawḥīd* or the declaration of God’s Unity is that everything in creation derives from God, who is One Reality. The word *tawḥīd* comes from the same root as *waḥda*, as do other related and often discussed terms such as *aḥad* and *wāḥid* (“one”) and *aḥadiyya* and *waḥdāniyya* (“oneness” or “unity”). Already in the sayings of ʿAlī we come across a reference to four different meanings for the apparently simple statement, “God is One.”²

The discussion of *wujūd* enters Islamic thought somewhat later than the discussion of *waḥda* and plays an important role especially in the development of *falsafa* or philosophy, which is often defined as the study of *wujūd*. If the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* is not found in any

texts before the works of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s school, many statements of the Sufis approximate it.³ Maʾrūf al-Karkhī (d. 200/815–816) is said to have been the first to reexpress the *shahāda* in the form often heard in later centuries, “There is nothing in *wujūd* but God.”⁴ Abul-ʿAbbās Qaṣṣāb (fl. 4th/10th century) used similar terms: “There is nothing in the two worlds except my Lord. The existent things (*mawjūdāt*) – all things except His *wujūd* – are nonexistent (*maʾdūm*).”⁵

Khwāja ʿAbdallāh Anṣārī (d. 481/1089) provides several formulations of *tawḥīd* in Persian and Arabic that surely inspired later authors. In defining five levels of *tawḥīd*, he speaks about the third level as *wujūd al-tawḥīd* or “the existence of *tawḥīd*,” which is “to leave all witnesses and enter into the Eternal Witness.” The final stage, the “enfolding of *tawḥīd* within *tawḥīd*,” is “the absorption of that which never was into That which ever is.” In another passage, Anṣārī refers to the “*tawḥīd* of the elect” as the fact that “No one is other than He” (*laysa ghayrahu aḥad*). “What is *tawḥīd*?”, Anṣārī asks. “God, and nothing else. The rest is folly (*hawās*).”⁶

By the time of al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), the term *wujūd* is often employed in explanations of *tawḥīd*’s meaning. In *Mishkāt al-anwār* al-Ghazālī describes the fruit of the spiritual ascent of the gnostics as follows: “They see through direct witnessing that there is nothing in *wujūd* save God and that ‘All things are perishing except His Face’” (Sura 28:88).⁷ Al-Ghazālī did not consider this understanding of *tawḥīd* a specifically Sufi teaching, appropriate only for his more esoteric works, since he makes the same point in his famous *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*: “There is nothing in *wujūd* but God ... *wujūd* belongs only to the Real One.”⁸ Passages such as these, which were later looked upon as statements of the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, are numerous, but let us turn to the expression itself and the “Greatest Master,” al-Shaykh al-Akbar, Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240), to whom its first clear and detailed formulation is usually ascribed.

Ibn al-ʿArabī

Few figures in Islamic intellectual history have been as pervasively influential as Ibn al-ʿArabī. Nevertheless, modern scholars have produced only a relatively small number of serious studies of his works, and these have usually been limited in scope.⁹ This is hardly surprising, since Ibn al-ʿArabī was one of the most prolific and difficult of all Muslim authors. All his works exhibit an extremely

high level of sophistication, definitely not for popular consumption. When he refers disparagingly to the *‘amma* or “common people,” he usually has in mind the exoteric scholars, the jurists or “knowers of formalities” (*‘ulamā al-rusūm*) as he calls them – in other words, the learned class of Muslims in the ordinary sense of the term. But he also uses the term for Sufis who have not yet advanced to the stage of “verification” (*taḥqīq*) and who continue to follow authority (*taqlīd*). Ibn al-‘Arabī expected his readers not only to be practitioners of Sufism but also to be familiar with most fields of learning, especially Koran commentary, hadith, jurisprudence, theology, and philosophy, and he made few allowances for those who did not know these sciences well. His writings are clear, consistent, and logically structured, even though they may appear opaque to those not familiar with them. As James Morris remarks, “The bizarre epithets one sometimes finds applied to Ibn al-‘Arabī, whether in Islamic or modern Western sources – e.g., ‘incoherent,’ ‘pantheist,’ ‘heretic,’ ‘monist,’ ‘madman,’ etc – are understandable less as reasoned judgments about the whole of his work than as reactions to the difficult challenge of unifying and integrating such diverse and challenging materials.”¹⁰

Despite the fact that relatively little research has been carried out on Ibn al-‘Arabī’s teachings, his fame along with that of *waḥdat al-wujūd* has spread far outside academic circles. But Ibn al-‘Arabī himself, so far as is known, never employs the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* in his enormous corpus of writings,¹¹ even though he frequently discusses *wujūd* and the fact that it can be described as possessing the attribute of oneness or unity (employing such terms as *waḥda*, *waḥdāniyya*, and *aḥadiyya*). For example:

Nothing has become manifest in *wujūd* through *wujūd* except the Real (*al-ḥaqq*), since *wujūd* is the Real, and He is one.¹²

The entity [*ayn*] of *wujūd* is one, but its properties [*aḥkām*] are diverse.¹³

Number [*‘adad*] derives from the one that accepts a second, not the one of *wujūd* [*al-wāḥid al-wujūd*].¹⁴

All of *wujūd* is one in reality; there is nothing along with it.¹⁵

But what did Ibn al-‘Arabī mean when he said that *wujūd* is one? If ‘Alī provided four different meanings for the statement “God is one,” the statement “*Wujūd* is one” cannot be as simple as it might appear, especially since the later use of the term *waḥdat al-wujūd*, by its supporters as well as its detractors, hinges upon divergent understandings of what this oneness implies.

At the outset, we need to know that any attempt to explain the meaning of *waḥdat al-wujūd* as understood by Ibn al-‘Arabī will be deficient and misleading, all the more so if one tries to classify his teachings as pantheism, panentheism, existential monism, pantheistic monism, or the like. Ibn al-‘Arabī explains *waḥdat al-wujūd* in hundreds of different contexts, each time adding nuances that are lost when any attempt is made, as it soon is in most Western studies, to “come to the point.” His “point” does not, in fact, lie in any simple formulation of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. If people want a simple statement, they should be satisfied with “There is no god but God.” Ibn al-‘Arabī’s point lies more in the very act of constantly reformulating *waḥdat al-wujūd* in order to reshape the reader’s imagination. In each new context in which he expresses *waḥdat al-wujūd*, he demonstrates the intimate inward interrelationships among phenomena, basing himself on a great variety of texts drawn from the Koran, hadith, kalam, philosophy, cosmology, Arabic grammar, and other sources.

Ibn al-‘Arabī is a visionary, not a philosopher, which means among other things that he is not trying to reach a conclusion or build a system. He had no intention of systematizing Islamic thought, even though various passages in his writings take systematic form (and sometimes contradict the systematic formulations he has provided elsewhere). He is a sage who has a vision of reality that he is trying to communicate through all the means at his disposal, including logical discourse in the philosophical and theological style, exegesis of the Koran and hadith, and poetry. (We should not forget that Ibn al-‘Arabī was one of the greatest and most prolific poets in the Arabic language.) *Waḥdat al-wujūd* is one of the many dimensions of the overall vision Ibn al-‘Arabī wants to convey. He did not consider it the highest expression of his teachings, which helps explain why he himself has no single word for it.¹⁶ The fact that *waḥdat al-wujūd* came to be chosen as the term that typifies his point of view has less to do with Ibn al-‘Arabī himself than with certain figures who followed him.

The statement that Ibn al-‘Arabī was a visionary and not a philosopher needs some clarification. Ibn al-‘Arabī frequently tells us that reason or intellect (*‘aql*) is inadequate as a source of knowledge of God, the world, and the self. His own teachings are based primarily upon unveiling (*kashf*), direct witnessing (*shuhūd*, *mushāhada*), and tasting (*dhawq*), all of which transcend the limitations of reason. He repeatedly quotes Koranic verses such as “Have fear of God, and God will teach you” (Sura 2:287). Only this teaching by

God Himself, founded upon observing the rules and regulations of the shari'a and the discipline of the *ṭarīqa* or spiritual path can lead to true knowledge.

One of Ibn al-'Arabī's most important technical terms is *tajallī* "self-disclosure," derived ultimately from the Koranic story of Moses and God's self-revelation to the mountain (Sura 7:143). The self-disclosure of God is at the same time ontological and epistemological, objective and subjective, since God displays Himself in both knowledge and the universe. Ibn al-'Arabī does not think up or produce ideas. He simply records God's self-disclosures, which he perceives objectively and subjectively; nor would he draw a distinction between objective and subjective – this is our terminology, not his. Often his unveilings take the shape of incredible formal visions of the unseen world. He would feel completely at home with Rūmī's verses:

First there were intoxication, loverhood, youth and the like; then came luxuriant spring, and they all sat together.

They had no forms and then became manifested beautifully within forms – behold things of the imagination assuming form!

The heart is the antechamber of the eye: For certain, everything that reaches the heart will enter into the eye and become a form.¹⁷

Once we grasp the fact that we are not dealing here with a philosophical or theological system, we can begin to appreciate the difficulty of providing even an elementary understanding of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. As Toshihiko Izutsu has justly remarked,

No philosophical explanation can do justice to [Ibn al-'Arabī's] thought unless it is backed by a personal experience of the Unity of Being [*waḥdat al-wujūd*] ... Philosophical interpretation is after all an afterthought applied to the naked content of mystical intuition.¹⁸

A major problem in understanding *waḥdat al-wujūd* is the term *wujūd*, which for the most part I have avoided translating in this article, since there is no satisfactory equivalent in English. To render it either as "being" or "existence" raises difficulties, a thorough investigation of which could easily fill the remainder of this paper. Here I want to point out another well-known problem connected with the term. Since *wujūd* derives from the root *w-j-d* "to find," it means not only to be found in an objective sense (in other words, to exist out there), but also the act of finding as a subjective experience. More specifically, *wujūd* refers both to God as the Absolute Reality and to the finding of God as experienced by God Himself and by the

spiritual seeker. Hence Ibn al-'Arabī often refers to the "people of unveiling and finding" (*ahl al-kashf wa l-wujūd*),¹⁹ meaning those who have experienced the lifting of the veils that separate them from God, thus finding God in the cosmos and in themselves. In this sense *wujūd* is practically synonymous with *shuhūd* (often translated as "witnessing" or "contemplation").²⁰ *Wujūd*, like *shuhūd*, refers to *tajallī*, the divine self-disclosure, and both words have objective and subjective senses. For this and other reasons, the later debate between the supporters of *waḥdat al-wujūd* and those of *waḥdat al-shuhūd* obscures the fact that Ibn al-'Arabī cannot be placed in one category or the other without distorting his overall teachings.²¹

If the question of *wujūd* as subjective experience is ignored, it can be seen that Ibn al-'Arabī employs the term *wujūd* in two basic senses. First, the term refers to God, who is the Real Being (*al-wujūd al-ḥaqq*) or the Necessary Being (*wājib al-wujūd*) who cannot not be. Second, the term may also refer to the universe or the things within it. However, when Ibn al-'Arabī speaks of the *wujūd* of "that which is other than God" (*mā siwā Allāh*), he is using the term in a metaphorical sense (*majāz*). Like al-Ghazālī and many others, he maintains that in reality (*ḥaqīqa*), *wujūd* belongs only to God. If things other than God appear to exist, this is because God has lent them *wujūd*, much in the same way that the sun lends light to the inhabitants of the earth.²² In the last analysis, there is nothing in existence but the Real. There is only one Being, one *wujūd*, even though we are justified in speaking of many "existent things" (*mawjūdāt*) in order to address ourselves to the plurality that we perceive in the phenomenal world.

If *wujūd* belongs only to God, then everything other than God is nonexistent in itself, though it is existent to the extent that it manifests the Real. In themselves the creatures are entities (*a'yān*) or things (*ashyā'*), but they possess no existence of their own. The so-called immutable entities (*al-a'yān al-thābita*), often misleadingly called archetypes,²³ are the things as they are known by God for all eternity; in other words, the immutable entities are the things without reference to their existence in the created world. Hence they are more or less synonymous with what the philosophers call essences or quiddities (*māhiyyāt*).

When God bestows existence upon the entities, they appear in the universe, just as colors appear when light shines. But since the entities have no existence of their own, nothing is perceived but the *wujūd* of God imbued with the properties (*aḥkām*) of the entities. In trying to explain this point, one can do no better in a brief discuss-

ion than refer to the analogy of the rainbow, where the multiplicity of colors does not negate the oneness of light. Red and blue have no existence of their own, since only light is manifest. We can speak of the reality or entity or thingness (*shay'yya*) of red and blue, but not of their own, independent existence; their existence is only a mode of light's existence.

Though Ibn al-'Arabī often discourses on the nature of *wujūd*'s oneness, he devotes far more attention to affirming the reality of multiplicity. His basic teaching goes back to the divine names mentioned so frequently in the Koran. The names are the archetypes of manyness, a divinely revealed affirmation of the reality of multiplicity. But again, to uphold the reality of multiplicity does not, in Ibn al-'Arabī's view, necessitate upholding the independent *wujūd* of the multiple things.

Ibn al-'Arabī commonly expresses his most fundamental view of *wujūd* through the theological concepts of *tanzīh* and *tashbīh*. The first term is often translated as "transcendence," the second as "anthropomorphism" or "immanence." Here I translate the words more literally as "incomparability" and "similarity." Ibn al-'Arabī declares that God in Himself is incomparable with every created thing. In other words, *wujūd* is totally beyond the reach of everything in the cosmos; it is the absolutely nonmanifest (*al-bāṭin*). But the Koran teaches that God is not only nonmanifest, but also manifest (*al-zāhir*). As such, God is similar to all things, since, by means of His names, He displays the properties of His own attributes in the cosmos. The universe is nothing but the outward manifestation of the innate properties of *wujūd*, just as colors, forms, and shapes are nothing but the outward manifestation of light. God is at once incomparable, because absolutely nonmanifest, and similar, because He displays His names and attributes by means of the existent things.

Wujūd, therefore, is not only one. The term *waḥdat al-wujūd* in its literal sense does not afford a sufficient description of the nature of reality. *Wujūd* is one in itself at the level of its nonmanifestation or its incomparability, and many through its manifestation or its similarity; God is one in His essence (*dhāt*) and many through His names. Hence Ibn al-'Arabī sometimes refers to God as the "One/Many" (*al-wāḥid al-kathīr*).²⁴

The most succinct expression of Ibn al-'Arabī's teachings about the nature of the one *wujūd* and its relationship to the multiplicity of the cosmos is probably the phrase "He/not He" (*huwa lā huwa*). What is a creature, a thing, an existent reality, a world? It is He/not

He. A thing is identical with *wujūd* inasmuch as it exists, but other than *wujūd* inasmuch as it is itself. Ibn al-'Arabī's opponents, in criticizing his teachings, look only at the first half of this phrase: "The cosmos is He." This sentence recalls the refrain employed by Persian poets long before Ibn al-'Arabī, "All is He" (*hama ūst*).²⁵ For his part, Ibn al-'Arabī constantly affirms that the cosmos is also not He. One must combine affirmation and negation, just as one must combine incomparability and similarity. To affirm that "All is He" and to forget that "All is not He" would be unacceptable. But it would be equally unacceptable to claim that "All is not He" in every respect, for that would make the cosmos into an independent reality, another divinity.

Ibn al-'Arabī sometimes calls those who witness the cosmos as He/not He "the possessors of two eyes" (*dhu l-'aynan*). With one eye they look at God's absolute incomparability and with the other His similarity:

The perfect human being [*al-insān al-kāmil*] has two visions [*naẓar*] of the Real, which is why God appointed for him two eyes. With one eye he looks upon Him in respect of the fact that He is "independent of the worlds" [Sura 3:97]. So he sees Him neither in any thing nor in himself. With the other eye he looks upon Him in respect of His name All-merciful [*al-raḥmān*], which seeks the cosmos and is sought by the cosmos. He sees His *wujūd* permeating all things.²⁶

Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī

Probably the most influential of Ibn al-'Arabī's disciples was Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī (d. 673/1274). Qūnawī's father, Majd al-Dīn Ishāq, was a scholar and Sufi from Malatya in present-day Turkey who met Ibn al-'Arabī on a pilgrimage to Mecca in the year 600/1204. In 602/1205–1206 the two traveled to Malatya together, and Ibn al-'Arabī may have been present at the birth of Majd al-Dīn's son in 606/1210. After Majd al-Dīn's death, Ibn al-'Arabī married his widow and undertook the training of Ṣadr al-Dīn, who became one of his closest disciples. When Ibn al-'Arabī died in 638/1240, Ṣadr al-Dīn returned to Anatolia and settled in Konya, where he eventually became a friend of Rūmī. Aflākī provides many accounts of the high regard in which the two held each other, and he tells us that Rūmī asked Shaykh Ṣadr al-Dīn to lead the prayer at his funeral. Qūnawī died seven months after Rūmī.

Of all Ibn al-'Arabī's immediate disciples, Qūnawī was the most thoroughly acquainted with philosophy. Having studied the com-

mentary of the foremost spokesman for the Peripatetic philosophy, Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274), on Avicenna's *al-Ishārāt wa l-tanbihāt*, Qūnawī initiated a correspondence, asking Ṭūsī many technical questions about the Peripatetic position. He felt enough mastery of Avicenna's writings to object on his behalf to Ṭūsī's answers and to suggest that he reread a particular passage in Avicenna's *Ta'līqāt*. In explaining his motive for writing, Qūnawī said that he hoped to combine the conclusions derived from logical proofs (*burhān*) with the fruits of verified unveiling (*mukāshafa-yi muḥaqqaq*) and face-to-face vision of the unseen world (*ʿiyān*).²⁷

Qūnawī's philosophical bent appears mainly in the logical and systematic structure of his writings. In contrast, Ibn al-'Arabī's *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* is essentially a commentary on selected passages from the Koran and hadith. In reading the *Futūḥāt*, one always feels close to the sources of the Islamic tradition and never senses a predominance of the systematic style of the philosophers. But Qūnawī's works are dominated by a rational and coherent style, even if the emphasis on mystical unveiling as a source of knowledge would not convince a logician.²⁸ At least partly because of his grounding in the philosophical tradition, Qūnawī stresses the centrality of *wujūd* to all discussion, whereas this point is not nearly so apparent in the works of Ibn al-'Arabī, who is more likely to use Koranic terminology. Qūnawī's connections with philosophy provided Ibn Taymiyya with a reason to attack him even more violently than he attacked Ibn al-'Arabī. Ibn Taymiyya summarizes the difference of approach that appears in the writings of Ibn al-'Arabī and Qūnawī by quoting their disciple 'Afīf al-Dīn Tilimsānī (d. 690/1291):

As for Ibn al-'Arabī's companion Ṣadr al-Dīn of Rūm, he had pretensions to philosophy [*mutafalsif*], so he was further from the *sharī'a* and Islam. That is why . . . Tilimsānī used to say, "My first shaykh was a philosophizing spiritual [*mutarawḥ mutafalsif*], while my second was a spiritual philosopher [*faylasūf mutarawḥ*]."²⁹

Though Qūnawī employs the expression *waḥdat al-wujūd* (or *waḥda wujūdih*, "one oneness of His Being") in at least two passages, he does not use it as an independent technical term. Rather, it comes up naturally in discussions of the relationship between God's *wujūd* and oneness. In the following passage he employs the philosophical language of *waḥda* and *wujūd* to explain the two modes of the Real – His oneness in Himself and His plurality in His manifestation:

Know that the Real is sheer *wujūd* within which is no diversity and that He is one with a true oneness in contrast to which no manyness can be conceptualized . . . All things perceived in the entities and witnessed in the engendered things . . . are the properties of *wujūd*; or, call them the forms of the relationships within His knowledge . . . Call them what you like: They are not *wujūd*, since *wujūd* is one . . . *Wujūd* cannot be perceived by a human being inasmuch as he is one with a true oneness, like *waḥdat al-wujūd* . . . Nothing issues from God, in respect of the *waḥda* of His *wujūd*, except one.³⁰

In another passage Qūnawī employs the expression "the oneness of His *wujūd*" in the midst of explaining that multiplicity does not contradict *wujūd*'s oneness, since the multiple things are merely the "tasks" (*shu'ūn*, sing. *sha'n*) of the divine Essence. These tasks, Qūnawī explains elsewhere, are identical with the immutable entities (*al-a'yan al-thābita*).³¹

As for the interrelationship [*munāsaba*] between the One Real and everything else, that is established on the part of the "other" [*siwā*] in respect of the fact that God's tasks are not other than God, since they are the realities of the things, which introduce plurality into the *waḥda* of His *wujūd* and are named the "others" [*aghyār*].³²

As these two passages show, Qūnawī, like Ibn al-'Arabī, held that the oneness of *wujūd* does not prevent the multiplicity of its self-manifestations. Though one in its essence or in respect of its incomparability, *wujūd* is many in its appearances or in respect of its similarity. In Qūnawī's own words, "Though there is nothing but one *wujūd*, it manifests itself as diverse, multiple, and plural because of the diversity of the realities of the receptacles. Nevertheless, in itself and in respect of its disengagement from the loci of manifestation, *wujūd* does not become plural or multiple."³³

Sa'īd al-Dīn Farghānī

Among Qūnawī's many disciples and students, two were especially important for the spread of Ibn al-'Arabī's school. The first was Mu'ayyid al-Dīn Jandī (d. 690/1291), whose commentary on Ibn al-'Arabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* formed the basis for most of the numerous commentaries that were written later. Though he was deeply concerned with explaining the nature of *wujūd* and *waḥda*, he does not appear to have employed the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* even in passing.³⁴ Phrases approximating it, however, are not difficult to find; for example: "*Wujūd* is one reality that becomes intelligibly

differentiated within distinct levels"; "None has *wujūd* except one entity, which is the Real."³⁵ Jandī wrote poetry in both Arabic and Persian, including this line: "He is one, the existent in all, He alone, but imagination calls Him 'other.'"³⁶

The second major follower of Qūnawī is Sa'īd al-Dīn Farghānī (d. 699/1300), author of the first commentary on the famous "Poem of the Way" (*Naẓm al-sulūk* or *al-Tā'iyya*) of Ibn al-Fāriḍ. Farghānī wrote this work first in Persian with the title *Mashāriq al-darārī*. Then he wrote a much more detailed version in Arabic, renaming it *Muntaha l-madārik*. In a short preface to the Persian text, Qūnawī says that in the year 643/1245–1246 (five years after Ibn al-'Arabī's death) he traveled from Syria to Egypt with a group of learned and spiritually advanced Sufis. During this journey and upon his return to Anatolia, he read and explained the "Poem of the Way" to his companions, who took notes with the aim of compiling commentaries on difficult passages; only Farghānī succeeded in this goal.³⁷ Hence we have Qūnawī's testimony that Farghānī's works are based directly on his teachings, though in any case this is obvious from the style and content.

In the Persian environment Farghānī's two commentaries seem to have been as influential as any other work of Ibn al-'Arabī's school except Ibn al-'Arabī's own *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*. But while the *Fuṣūṣ* was considered difficult if not enigmatic and was seldom quoted except to provide brief statements of ideas, Farghānī's works were frequently cited to explain Ibn al-'Arabī's teachings. Farghānī found many devotees among the later students of *waḥdat al-wujūd* because, in contrast to Ibn al-'Arabī in the *Fuṣūṣ*, he dealt with each point of doctrine in a systematic manner, and in contrast to Qūnawī, he explained each point in detail.

Farghānī employs the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* about thirty times in his Persian commentary and probably at least as many times in the Arabic version of the work.³⁸ As remarked earlier, Ibn al-'Arabī expresses the doctrine of *tawḥīd* by declaring that God is both incomparable and similar, or one in Himself and many through the loci of His self-manifestation. Farghānī sometimes expresses this same idea by contrasting the oneness of *wujūd* with the manyness of God's knowledge (*kathrat al-'ilm*).³⁹ God knows all things in Himself as immutable entities; then, on the basis of this knowledge, He creates the universe. An ultimate oneness underlies creation because God is one, but the creatures are many in a true sense because all multiplicity goes back to God's knowledge of the many things.⁴⁰ Oneness and manyness are both attributes of the divine

reality, though from different points of view. In Farghānī's words, "Both the oneness of *wujūd* and the manyness of knowledge . . . are attributes of the Essence."⁴¹

When Farghānī employs the expression *waḥdat al-wujūd*, he usually considers it one of the three main stages of spiritual growth undergone by travelers on the path. From this point of view, the contemplation of *waḥdat al-wujūd* is the first and lowest stage, while the contemplation of the manyness of God's knowledge is the second stage. The third and final stage combines oneness and manyness in a harmonious balance. At this stage, the prophet or the friend of God sees with "two eyes," as Ibn al-'Arabī puts it. There is also a fourth stage, but it pertains exclusively to the prophet Muhammad.⁴²

In Farghānī's writings, *waḥdat al-wujūd* has still not been established as an independent technical term, and certainly not as a designation for a specific school of thought. Moreover, the context of Farghānī's use of the term demonstrates that he does not consider it especially fundamental to Ibn al-'Arabī's point of view. Though he makes the same basic points in the Persian and Arabic versions of his commentary, he often does not carry the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* over from Persian into Arabic. If it were a technical term of any significance, he would certainly have kept it in the Arabic version. It is only the elements that make up the expression – *waḥda* and *wujūd* – that are important for the discussion, not the expression itself.

It is easy to see that Ibn al-'Arabī and his immediate followers accepted that there is only one true *wujūd* and held that the multiplicity of the cosmos manifests the one *wujūd* without making it plural. But Ibn al-'Arabī never employs the term *waḥdat al-wujūd*, while Qūnawī only mentions it in passing. Once Farghānī begins to employ the term repeatedly, it refers to a relatively low station of spiritual realization, since the adept who witnesses *waḥdat al-wujūd* still has to ascend to the manyness of knowledge and beyond; only the greatest of the prophets and friends of God attain to the station of combining the two perspectives, and at this point the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* plays no significant role. It is only in describing the first stage of the path that Farghānī sometimes uses it.

The question that naturally arises here is the following: How did the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* come to be singled out as the outstanding doctrine of Ibn al-'Arabī and his school? Not enough is known about the works of the various figures writing immediately after Ibn al-'Arabī to answer this question with certainty, but tentative conclusions can be suggested.

Ibn Sab'īn

Among the authors who may have used the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* in a technical sense are such disciples of Ibn al-'Arabī as Ibn Sawdakīn (d. 646/1248) and 'Afīf al-Dīn Tilimsānī.⁴³ The most likely source of the term is Qūnawī's contemporary Ibn Sab'īn (d. 669/1270), the author of the well-known answers to the "Sicilian Questions" by Emperor Frederick II Hohenstaufen. Though A. F. Mehren and L. Massignon count Ibn Sab'īn as the last representative of the Arab peripatetic school,⁴⁴ and though Ibn Sab'īn was certainly familiar with the Greek philosophers and their followers in Islam, his published writings display him primarily as a Sufi. One has to agree with Michel Chodkiewicz that Ibn Sab'īn was thoroughly influenced by the perspective of Ibn al-'Arabī, even if he does not acknowledge this fact in his works.⁴⁵

When Ibn Sab'īn expresses his own teachings, he often employs aphoristic, elliptical, and mysterious expressions more reminiscent of the sayings of the early Sufis than of philosophical treatises. His works stand in stark contrast to those of Qūnawī, whose philosophical training shows even when he recounts his most exalted visionary experiences, as in his *al-Nafaḥāt al-ilāhiyya*. It seems that much of what Ibn Sab'īn wrote was aimed at his own disciples and had practical applications to the spiritual life; hence he tends toward ellipses and paradoxes, throwing the disciples back upon their own spiritual resources to understand the point.

In the context of Sufism, Ibn Sab'īn appears primarily as a spiritual teacher who often employs the language of philosophy to make his point and who sometimes had to write philosophically for a public audience. All his works need to be read in the light of treatises such as his *Risālat al-naṣīḥa*, also known as *al-Nūriyya*, which deals mainly with the remembrance or invocation of God (*dhikr*). In this work, Ibn Sab'īn makes the practical application of his teachings explicit. He aims to take away the assurances of logical discourse and throw the disciple back on the invocation of the divine name "Allah." Chodkiewicz points out that Ibn Sab'īn frequently injects the phrase "Allah alone" (*Allāh faqat*) into the midst of his writings as a sort of leitmotiv. But this is not a statement of a philosophical position, but an incitement to his readers to follow the Koranic injunction, "Say 'Allah,' then leave them to themselves, playing their game of plunging" (Sura 6:91).

What is of particular interest here is that in several passages Ibn Sab'īn employs the term *waḥdat al-wujūd*, not in passing, but as a

specific designation for the fundamental nature of things. In him we find what we did not find in Qūnawī and his followers, namely, instances in which the term appears to have become a technical expression referring to the worldview of the sages and the friends of God. For example, he writes:

The common people and the ignorant are dominated by the accidental, which is manyness and plurality, while the elect – the men of knowledge – are dominated by the root, which is *waḥdat al-wujūd*. He who remains with the root does not undergo transferal or transformation; he remains fixed in his knowledge and his realization. But he who stays with the branch undergoes transformation and transferal; things become many in his eyes, so he forgets and becomes negligent and ignorant.⁴⁶

Awḥad al-Dīn Balyānī

Among the important figures who followed in the line of Ibn Sab'īn is Awḥad al-Dīn Balyānī (d. 686/1288), who was probably connected to him through Ibn Sab'īn's chief disciple, Shushtarī. Balyānī is the author of the "Treatise on Unity," translated into English in 1901 and often quoted to illustrate Ibn al-'Arabī's understanding of the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. Until recently this work was usually attributed to Ibn al-'Arabī himself, but Michel Chodkiewicz has shown that it is by Balyānī and that it does not present a balanced statement of Ibn al-'Arabī's teachings.⁴⁷ The tone is familiar:

By Himself He sees Himself, and by Himself He knows Himself. None sees Him other than He, and none perceives Him other than He. His veil is His oneness; nothing veils other than He. His veil is the concealment of His existence in His oneness, without any quality . . . His Prophet is He, and His sending is He, and His word is He. He sent Himself with Himself to Himself.⁴⁸

So the work continues; in sum, it is an ecstatic hymn set to the tune of the Persian poetical exclamation, "All is He!" (*hama ūst*). Hence it should not be surprising to hear that its author lived in Shiraz and wrote Persian poetry that presents the same ideas in a non-philosophical style full of precedents in his own language.⁴⁹

Balyānī's exposition of *waḥdat al-wujūd* cannot be put into the same category as that of Ibn al-'Arabī and his immediate disciples, who always took care to offset expressions of God's similarity with descriptions of His incomparability. Where Balyānī and others like him say "He," Ibn al-'Arabī and his followers say "He/not He,"

though this does not mean that Balyānī had nothing more to say on the matter. His “Treatise on Unity” is no more an attempt to provide a full explanation of the nature of existence than was the oft-repeated “I am the Real” (*ana l-ḥaqq*) of al-Ḥallāj.

Sa'd al-Dīn Ḥammūya and 'Azīz al-Dīn Nasafī

One of the many important figures who may have played a role in establishing *waḥdat al-wujūd* as a technical term is Sa'd al-Dīn Ḥammūya (d. 649/1252), a Persian disciple of the great Najm al-Dīn Kubrā. Ḥammūya spent several years in Damascus, where he met both Ibn al-'Arabī and Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī. He wrote a letter to Ibn al-'Arabī in which he asked him to clarify certain points in some of his writings.⁵⁰ Though Ḥammūya is the author of more than fifty works, only one of these has been edited, probably because most of his writings offer little encouragement to scholars. As Jāmī noted five hundred years ago, “He has many works . . . full of mysterious sayings, difficult words, numbers, diagrams, and circles, which the eye of reason and thought is incapable of deciphering.”⁵¹ Some passages quoted from Ḥammūya by his disciple 'Azīz al-Dīn Nasafī (d. before 700/1300) suggest that he expressed himself in an aphoristic and elliptical style similar to that of Ibn Sab'īn. For example, Nasafī writes,

The shaykh of shaykhs Sa'd al-Dīn Ḥammūya was asked, “What is God?”
He replied, “The existent [*al-mawjūd*] is God.”
Then he was asked, “What is the cosmos?”
He replied, “There is no existent but God.”⁵²

Nasafī probably played a much more important role than Ḥammūya in popularizing Ibn al-'Arabī's teachings, through such well-known Persian works as *Insān-i kāmīl*. Like Ibn Sab'īn, to whom he sometimes refers in his works, Nasafī employs the expression *waḥdat al-wujūd* in a few instances as a technical term to refer to a whole doctrine, not part of a doctrine.⁵³ And like Ibn Taymiyya after him, he frequently employs the expression *ahl-i waḥdat*, the “people of oneness,” to refer to those who supported *waḥdat al-wujūd*.⁵⁴ He was probably the first to divide the people of oneness into different groups according to their differing formulations of *waḥdat al-wujūd*.

In several instances Nasafī includes his own master Ḥammūya among the people of oneness, and in one passage he says that some of them consider God's creation as “imagination and display”

(*khayāl wa namāyish*). He probably has Ḥammūya in mind as a member of this group, since we read in Ḥammūya's *al-Miṣbāḥ fi l-taṣawwuf*, a book of obscure meditations on the symbolism of letters, “Whatever you see other than oneness is imagination.”⁵⁵

Ibn Taymiyya

The violent attacks mounted by the Hanbalite jurist Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) against Ibn al-'Arabī and those who followed him are well known.⁵⁶ Ibn Taymiyya often refers to the term *waḥdat al-wujūd*, even employing it in the titles of two of his treatises: *Ibtāl waḥdat al-wujūd* (“Showing the falsity of *waḥdat al-wujūd*”) and *Risāla ilā man sa'alahu 'an ḥaqīqat madhhab al-ittihādiyyīn, ay al-qā'ilīn bi-waḥdat al-wujūd* (“A treatise written to the one who asked him about the reality of the position of the unificationists, that is, those who support *waḥdat al-wujūd*”).⁵⁷ It is particularly significant that in the second of these titles Ibn Taymiyya identifies “oneness of *wujūd*” with “unificationism” (*ittihād*). He repeats this identification in many passages of his works, often adding the term “incarnationism” (*ḥulūl*) as a second near-synonym.⁵⁸ Both terms had long been attacked as the heresies of certain sects or figures, and both are specifically rejected by Ibn al-'Arabī and his followers, at least in the meaning that is given to the terms by those who criticize them.⁵⁹

Ibn Taymiyya sums up his objections to the proponents of *waḥdat al-wujūd* by claiming that they deny the three basic principles of the religion: They have no faith in God, in His prophets, or in the Last Day. I quote part of his explanation:

As for faith in God: They think that His *wujūd* is identical with the *wujūd* of the cosmos and that the cosmos has no other maker than the cosmos itself.

As for the prophets: These people think that they have more knowledge of God than God's Messenger and all the other prophets. Some claim to take knowledge of God – that is, *waḥdat al-wujūd* and atheism [*ta'ṭīl*] – from the Prophets' lamp.⁶⁰

Note that in this passage, by citing *waḥdat al-wujūd* and *ta'ṭīl* as parallel terms, Ibn Taymiyya is identifying the two. *Ta'ṭīl* is variously defined in theological texts and always condemned. Its basic meaning is to consider God divested of His office, somewhat in the fashion of deism.

Ibn Taymiyya claims that the supporters of *waḥdat al-wujūd*

believe that the *wujūd* of the cosmos is identical with the *wujūd* of God: "Those who uphold *waḥdat al-wujūd* say that *wujūd* is one and that the necessary *wujūd* that belongs to the Creator is the same as the possible *wujūd* that belongs to the creature."⁶¹ Elsewhere he writes, "The reality of the words" of those who speak of *waḥdat al-wujūd* "is that the *wujūd* of the engendered things is identical with the *wujūd* of God; it is nothing else and nothing different."⁶²

In other words, Ibn Taymiyya holds that according to Ibn al-'Arabī, God and the cosmos are identical. Thus he takes a simplistic view of one side of Ibn al-'Arabī's teaching – that of similarity of immanence (*tashbih*) – and completely ignores the other side, that of incomparability or transcendence (*tanzīh*). Ibn al-'Arabī's often restated position is "He/not He." The *wujūd* of the cosmos can be said to be identical with the *wujūd* of God in one respect, but strictly speaking, the cosmos has no *wujūd*. The whole problem is to define the subtle relationship that exists between the real *wujūd* of God and the unreal *wujūd* of the creatures. Ibn Taymiyya and most of those who followed in his footsteps seem to have believed that there must be a simple, straightforward explanation for the relationship between God and the cosmos. In contrast, Ibn al-'Arabī and most of his followers held that the highest understanding is utter bewilderment (*ḥayra*) in the face of a reality that defies the categories of yes and no, either/or.

In any case, it is not my purpose to defend Ibn al-'Arabī against the charges of Ibn Taymiyya and others. I merely want to point out that Ibn Taymiyya considered *waḥdat al-wujūd* synonymous with atheism and unbelief, since he saw it as a denial of the distinction between God and the cosmos. And because of his frequent explicit attacks on the term *waḥdat al-wujūd*, he probably deserves more credit than anyone else for making it a center of contention in Islamic history, since, as we have seen, it played no important role in the technical vocabulary of Ibn al-'Arabī and his direct followers. Even third and fourth generation commentators on the *Fuṣuṣ al-ḥikam*, like Jandī's student 'Abd al-Razzāq Kāshānī (d. 730/1330) and Kāshānī's student Sharaf al-Dīn Dāwūd Qaysarī (d. 751/1350) – both contemporaries of Ibn Taymiyya – rarely if ever mention the term.⁶³ In a treatise called *Asās al-waḥdāniyya* ("The Foundation of Oneness"), in which he discusses the terms *waḥda* and *wujūd* in detail, Qaysarī can get no closer to the expression *waḥdat al-wujūd* than one instance of *waḥda wājib al-wujūd*, the "Oneness of the Necessary Being."⁶⁴ Hence, when Ibn Taymiyya singled out the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* as exemplifying the position of the unifi-

cationists, he probably derived it from the works of Ibn Sab'īn, to which he often refers, or from one of Ibn Sab'īn's disciples.

Though Ibn Taymiyya and others like him employed the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* to denote the heresies they perceived in the writings of Ibn al-'Arabī's school, Ibn al-'Arabī's later followers seemed to have had no qualms about accepting the term as a convenient denotation for their overall worldview. They were happy to consider it a term of praise, even if their critics considered it a term of blame. Thus by the middle of the ninth/fifteenth century 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 898/1492), one of the greatest propagators of Ibn al-'Arabī's serious metaphysical and cosmological teachings, commonly speaks of the "supporters of the oneness of being" (*al-qā'ilūn bi waḥdat al-wujūd*), meaning thereby Ibn al-'Arabī, Qūnawī, Farghānī, and the main line of *Fuṣuṣ* commentators.⁶⁵

The history of the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* can be summarized as follows: The term is not found in the writings of Ibn al-'Arabī. For Qūnawī, it has no specific technical sense; where it does occur, it means simply that there is only one true *wujūd*, the *wujūd* of God. The relationship of this *wujūd* to the things of the world needs to be explained; it is not implied in the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* itself. In Faghānī's writings *waḥdat al-wujūd* is well on its way to becoming a technical term, but it does not stand on its own, since it needs to be complemented by *kathrat al-'ilm*, the manyness of knowledge. Off to the side of this main line of Ibn al-'Arabī's followers, other figures like Ibn Sab'īn and Nasafī were employing the term as a kind of shorthand to allude to the fundamental nature of things. Ibn Taymiyya seized upon the expression as a synonym for the great heresies of unificationism and incarnationism. By the time of Jāmī, and perhaps much before, *waḥdat al-wujūd* became the designation for an expression of *tawḥīd* that was typified by the writings of Ibn al-'Arabī and his followers.

Orientalists

Western studies of Ibn al-'Arabī in modern times have greatly complicated the task of discerning what is meant by *waḥdat al-wujūd*. Many of the earlier orientalists, like historians of thought in general, felt that by putting a label on an idea, they had understood it and had no more need to think about it. Ibn al-'Arabī in particular attracted labels, which is not surprising. One look at the difficulty and sheer volume of his writings convinced most people that it would be futile to spend a lifetime trying to decipher them.

The easiest solution was to call Ibn al-'Arabī a pantheist or to claim that he stood outside of "orthodox" Islam and to move on to greener pastures. This was far preferable to admitting that he was a spiritual teacher, sage, philosopher, theologian, Koran commentator, and jurist of the first order, a figure whose elaborate synthesis of Islamic thought cannot be approached without long years of training. After all, what would be gained by admitting that the Orient had produced forms of knowledge that cannot be filed into neat cubbyholes?

More recently, a number of serious scholars have taken the trouble to study some of Ibn al-'Arabī's works and to meditate upon his teachings in depth. The facile assumptions of an earlier generation have been largely discarded, but the old labels are still to be found in the secondary literature. Among specialists, it is now generally recognized that "the repeated use of alien and inappropriate interpretive categories – e.g., 'pantheist,' 'monist,' 'theology,' 'heterodox/orthodox,' etc. – . . . cannot but mislead those lacking a firsthand acquaintance with Ibn al-'Arabī's works."⁶⁶

To try to sort out the views of Ibn al-'Arabī offered by various orientalist over the past one hundred years would entail a major study. Here I can only suggest that Western scholars have reflected the split concerning Ibn al-'Arabī found in Islam itself. Hence they have been divided into two camps: those for and those against, even though the language of "objective" scholarship often conceals personal predilections. In the eyes of those who take a negative approach, *waḥdat al-wujūd* becomes an easily dismissed "ism," or perhaps a distortion of "authentic" and "orthodox" Islam brought about by a morbid preoccupation with imaginative speculation that was but a prelude to the decline of a civilization. Scholars who offer a positive evaluation have realized that the worldview of this figure who has dominated much of Islamic thought for the past six hundred years cannot be dismissed so easily. Some even maintain that *waḥdat al-wujūd* represents a providential reformulation of *tawḥīd* in a philosophical language that can provide practical solutions for the spiritual malaise of the modern world.

The meanings of the term *waḥdat al-wujūd*

This brief review of the history of the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* allows me to propose seven different ways in which the term has been understood, without intending to be exhaustive. First, *waḥdat al-wujūd* denotes a school of thought that goes back to Ibn al-'Arabī

and makes certain statements about the nature of the relationship between God and the world. This meaning of the term came to be accepted by supporters and opponents of Ibn al-'Arabī and was established by the time of Jāmī.

The remaining six definitions depend on whether the person who employs the term has evaluated this school of thought positively or negatively.

A. Supporters

(1) When Qūnawī and Farghānī employ the term *waḥdat al-wujūd*, it represents a statement about *wujūd* or reality itself, without any implication that a whole system of thought lies behind it; in their works the term is invariably complemented by an affirmation of the manyness and plurality of the Real's self-manifestation in the cosmos.

(2) For Ibn Sab'īn, Nasafī, and the whole later tradition of Ibn al-'Arabī's followers, the expression *waḥdat al-wujūd* itself represents a sufficient statement about the nature of things. Those who employed the term in this sense felt no need to point out, at least not in the immediate context, that multiplicity also possesses a certain reality, though most of them do not deny this fact, except perhaps in moments of rhetorical excess.

(3) In the later tradition of Sufism and Islamic philosophy, *waḥdat al-wujūd* is often employed as a virtual synonym for *tawḥīd*, with the understanding that it refers primarily to the Sufi approach to expressing *tawḥīd*. In this most general sense the term can be used to refer to the ideas of Sufis who flourished long before Ibn al-'Arabī.

B. Opponents

(1) For Ibn Taymiyya, *waḥdat al-wujūd* is practically synonymous with incarnationism and unificationism, that is, the thesis that God and the world, or God and man, are identical. By a slight extension of this meaning, *waḥdat al-wujūd* becomes identical with broader negative categories, such as heresy, atheism, and unbelief (*ilḥād*, *zandaqa*, *ta'ṭīl*, *shirk*, *kufr*). I would also place in this category those Western interpretations of *waḥdat al-wujūd* that place upon it labels such as pantheism, usually with the obvious intent of denigrating its supporters and convincing us that we need not take it seriously.

(2) Certain later Sufis in India, especially Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1624), employ the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* in a less negative sense.

In general they acknowledge that it possesses a certain validity, but they maintain that "*waḥdat al-shuhūd*" represents a higher degree of spiritual attainment.⁶⁷ Though much research needs to be carried out before the sources and aims of this debate become completely clear, it seems that *waḥdat al-shuhūd* was proposed as a preferable position to *waḥdat al-wujūd* at least partly to foil the criticisms of Ibn Taymiyya and his followers. As Molé has pointed out, Sirhindī's way of expressing himself concerning *waḥdat al-shuhūd* "safeguarded the transcendence and absolute otherness of God."⁶⁸ If many Sufis continued to support *waḥdat al-wujūd* in opposition to *waḥdat al-shuhūd*, it was no doubt because in their eyes, *waḥdat al-wujūd* never posed any threat to God's transcendence and absolute otherness in the first place.

(3) The Indian distinction between *waḥdat al-wujūd* and *waḥdat al-shuhūd* was taken up by several orientalist, including Massignon, Anawati, and Gardet, who then read this distinction back into Islamic history on highly questionable grounds. Massignon had a well-known personal preference for the love mysticism of al-Ḥallāj and a deep aversion to Ibn al-'Arabī's approach. For him and those who followed him, *waḥdat al-wujūd* became "static existential monism," while *waḥdat al-shuhūd* was "dynamic testimonial monism," the latter far to be preferred over the former, not least because it accorded with "orthodoxy." Massignon's attribution of a "static" mysticism to those who supported *waḥdat al-wujūd* illustrates the typical sort of oversimplification indulged in by those who place labels on Ibn al-'Arabī, thus mutilating a highly complex doctrinal synthesis.⁶⁹ It is not my purpose to suggest all of the misunderstandings caused by reading such simplistically interpreted dichotomies back into Islamic history. I will only add that later Sufism came to distinguish between *waḥdat al-wujūd* and *waḥdat al-shuhūd* for internal reasons, to some of which I have already alluded. But to make this distinction normative for the whole history of Sufism is nearly as misleading as to employ categories such as pantheism. Though one cannot deny that Sufis illustrate deep differences of perspective, one can be certain that scholars who attempt to redefine terms such as *waḥdat al-wujūd* and *waḥdat al-shuhūd* in terms of Western philosophical and psychological categories only add to the confusion already present in our perception of Sufism's history.

These few remarks on the problems of understanding what is meant by the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* should at least warn us that we need to look carefully at how people who employ the term evaluate

Ibn al-'Arabī's teachings. In general, sympathizers see *waḥdat al-wujūd* as a restatement of *tawḥīd* in the language of the advanced and refined intellectuality of later Islamic history, while detractors consider it a deviation from the supposedly clear distinctions drawn between God and the cosmos by the early and relatively unsophisticated schools of theology. Nevertheless, the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* carries a good deal of baggage because of the long debate over its use. Thus all sorts of complications can arise that obscure what is at issue.

An interesting example of these complications is provided by the Festschrift prepared for the 800th anniversary of Ibn al-'Arabī's birth, in which an Egyptian scholar, who is a fervent supporter of Ibn al-'Arabī, writes that those who attribute *waḥdat al-wujūd* to Ibn al-'Arabī commit a grievous error. Though this scholar never defines what he understands by *waḥdat al-wujūd*, it is clear that he has accepted the negative evaluation of the term offered by Ibn al-'Arabī's opponents. In answer to this article, an Iranian scholar has written a strong rebuttal in which he demonstrates, in the light of the Iranian intellectual tradition, that *waḥdat al-wujūd* forms the backbone of Islamic thought.⁷⁰ It does not even occur to this critic to ask whether the Egyptian scholar has understood the term in the same way that he does. Careful reading of the two authors shows that they do not disagree as to what Ibn al-'Arabī believed and wrote about; both accept him as one of the greatest intellectual and spiritual authorities of Islam. They have merely stumbled over divergent understandings of the term *waḥdat al-wujūd*.

Rūmī

Finally I turn to Rūmī. In what respect can the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* be applied to his teachings? In other words, do any of the seven meanings offered above apply to Rūmī's way of looking at things?

Needless to say, Rūmī never employs the term *waḥdat al-wujūd*, so we can eliminate the two specific meanings that give to the term itself a technical significance (A(1) and A(2) above). We can also eliminate the three negative definitions, since Rūmī is too grand a figure to need defense against accusations of pantheism or unbelief, and he flourished long before anyone had tried to distinguish between *waḥdat al-wujūd* and *waḥdat al-shuhūd*.

This leave us with two definitions. When one says that *waḥdat al-wujūd* is simply *tawḥīd* expressed in the language of the Sufis and accepts that the words of Ma'rūf al-Karkhī in the second/eighth

century, "There is nothing in *wujūd* but God," are a statement of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, then of course Rūmī was a spokesman for *waḥdat al-wujūd*, and innumerable passages from his works can be cited to support this contention.

This leaves the definition of *waḥdat al-wujūd* in the first sense, as denoting the perspective of the specific school of thought that goes back to Ibn al-'Arabī. Many people have said that Rūmī believed in *waḥdat al-wujūd* because he was a follower or disciple of Ibn al-'Arabī. R. A. Nicholson, the greatest Western authority on the *Masnavī*, added weight to this approach by maintaining that Rūmī was influenced by him. Most recently, the *Encyclopedia of Religion* calls Rūmī a member of "Ibn al-'Arabī's school," though not in the article on Rūmī himself, written by Annemarie Schimmel.⁷¹

My own position is that Ibn al-'Arabī exercised no perceptible influence on Rūmī. The reasons for this are many. First, however, out of respect for these two great masters, I want to engage in a bit of introspection and ask why we are interested in such problems in the first place.

Scholars of an earlier generation seem to have felt that by saying "x influenced y" they had explained something of profound importance. Today, many people have come to understand that this sort of approach is deftly designed to turn their attention away from all that was considered important within the historical and cultural context in question. For Rūmī and Ibn al-'Arabī, historical influence was simply irrelevant to what they were saying. Like other Muslim sages, they considered the divine as primary and the human and historical as secondary. The spirit or meaning (*ma'nā*) is the root and the source, while the body or form (*sūra*) is the branch and the shadow. Whether metaphysically, cosmologically, or intellectually, the meaning of a doctrine takes precedence, while the forms it assumes are of secondary interest. Both Rūmī and Ibn al-'Arabī repeatedly affirm that they have not taken the content of their teachings from any human being. Their "vision" is of primary importance, not the source from which they derived the various formal elements that go to express it. For them, the vision was all. Divine self-disclosures are central, not peripheral. The transformative power of a Rūmī or an Ibn al-'Arabī derives from an intimate experience of God, and this power is not to be taken lightly, since it instilled a vibrant love and life into much of Islamic culture from the thirteenth century down to recent times, and it still possesses enough strength to attract "modern" men and women to esoteric conferences. One cannot read these authors without standing in awe of their

incredibly deep and profound mastery not only of the "roots of the roots of the roots of religion," as Rūmī put it, but the roots of everything that allows for a full flowering of the human condition.

Rūmī speaks also for Ibn al-'Arabī when he addresses his readers with the words, "Having seen the form, you are unaware of the meaning. If you are wise, pick out the pearl from the shell!"⁷² But our business as scholars is to trade in shells, not pearls. By definition, we miss the point. Once we understand that our research, from the perspective of the teachings of those we are studying, is off the mark, we can turn to the shells with perhaps a small amount of humility, knowing that the pearls will never be found through our trade.

This does not mean that the shells should be denigrated. No matter how great was the spiritual vision of a Rūmī or an Ibn al-'Arabī, it was expressed in shells, and on this level it is possible to speak about elements deriving from earlier sources and to draw certain conclusions about Rūmī's predecessors. Those who claim that Rūmī spoke for *waḥdat al-wujūd* in the specific sense of the doctrine propounded by Ibn al-'Arabī or his immediate followers will have to prove their contentions through these formal elements.

Henry Corbin remarks that "it would be quite superficial to dwell on the contrast between the two forms of spirituality cultivated by Mawlānā and Ibn al-'Arabī."⁷³ One agrees with Corbin that at the level of meaning, Rūmī and Ibn al-'Arabī converge profoundly, since they both spoke on behalf of the Supreme Meaning. But one also agrees that Ibn al-'Arabī and Rūmī represent "two forms of spirituality" which, as forms, are different. If one wants to talk about influence, this can be perceived only on the superficial level where forms influence forms, the same level where similarities and differences are perceived. No one can reach inside the hearts of Rūmī and Ibn al-'Arabī except through the forms and imagery that they use to express their inward states. At the inward level, there may indeed be deep and profound connections between Rūmī and Ibn al-'Arabī, since both lived and breathed *waḥdat al-wujūd* in the general sense of *tawḥīd*. But to speak of influence on the level of "meaning" or "spirit" is simply to indulge in speculation, since knowledge of influence can only be gained by means of the formal level. Once formal influence is found, there may be justification for concluding that there was a deeper, spiritual influence. Hence, one first has to look for borrowings of technical terms and poetical images.

In fact, at the level of linguistic forms, there is no concrete

evidence that Ibn al-'Arabī's doctrines, whether *waḥdat al-wujūd* or any other doctrine, influenced Rūmī's mode of expression. Rūmī employs few if any technical terms, poetical images, and concepts also employed by Ibn al-'Arabī that are not found in earlier authors. Both Rūmī and Ibn al-'Arabī were thoroughly familiar with all branches of religious knowledge, including Sufi classics such as al-Qushayrī's *Risāla* and al-Ghazālī's *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, so it is only natural that they share certain common terms and themes. But Ibn al-'Arabī also employed many terms in a specific manner that was not to be found in earlier writers; it is these specific terms and ideas that cannot be found in Rūmī's works, though they can be found in the poetry of his contemporary Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqī (d. 688/1289), a disciple of Qūnawī,⁷⁴ and in the verses of many poets of the next century, such as Shabistarī (d. 720/1320) and Maghribī (d. 809/1406–1407).

One might object that Rūmī was a greater poet than 'Irāqī and therefore had no need to employ the terminology of Ibn al-'Arabī, but that he was influenced nevertheless. This comes down to pure conjecture, since, once again, it only makes sense to speak of influence on the level of the formal elements involved. Moreover, there are many obvious influences upon Rūmī's poetry by such figures as the Sufi poets Sanā'ī (d. 525/1131) and 'Aṭṭār (d. 620/1218), or Rūmī's father Bahā' Walad, and Shams-i Tabrīzī.⁷⁵ One cannot claim that Rūmī was too great to show influence from Ibn al-'Arabī, but not great enough to discard the influence of Sanā'ī and 'Aṭṭār. Nor can one object that it was a question of the difference between Arabic and Persian, since much of Rūmī's technical terminology is derived from Arabic and he himself was the author of several hundred Arabic verses. And rather than seeing in his Arabic poetry the influence of Ibn al-'Arabī, one sees the imagery of an 'Aṭṭār or a Sanā'ī carried over from Persian.

In a broad historical context, it is not difficult to discern two relatively independent currents within Sufism, without denying cross-fertilization. Ibn al-'Arabī brings to fruition several centuries of spiritual ferment in Andalusia, North Africa, and Egypt. Rūmī brings to a climax a tradition of Persian Sufism going back to such figures as Anṣārī, Sanā'ī, and Aḥmad Ghazālī (d. 520/1126), author of the *Sawānīh*, surely the most seminal work on love in the Persian language. The influence of Anṣārī was especially widespread because of *Kashf al-asrār* (written in 520/1126), a lengthy Persian Koran commentary by his disciple Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī and a rich source of Sufi teachings. Rūmī may have been familiar with

Rawḥ al-arwāḥ, a long Persian commentary on the divine names by Aḥmad Sam'ānī (d. 534/1140) from Marw. This work, only recently brought to the attention of the scholarly community, constantly reminds one of Rūmī's concerns and style. Its audacious approach to Islamic teachings, constant stress on the importance of love, and highly poetical use of language may well have been one of Rūmī's formal inspirations.⁷⁶ Moreover, no one was as close to Rūmī as his father Bahā' Walad and Shams al-Dīn Tabrīzī, both of whose writings influenced his poetry profoundly.⁷⁷ Rūmī's father, who initiated Rūmī into Sufism, was a member of a Sufi order that went back to Aḥmad Ghazālī by way of 'Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadānī (d. 525/1131), the author of important works on love and a major precursor of the type of theosophical Sufism that characterizes Ibn al-'Arabī's school. The works of these authors provide more than enough material to account for any formal resemblances that might exist between Rūmī and earlier Sufism.

No one denies that earlier figures influenced Rūmī by providing him with imagery, symbols, technical terms, and doctrines. With this raw material Rūmī constructed a bodily form into which he breathed the spirit of his own vision of *tawḥīd*. But if the claim is to be made that a specific figure exercised influence, there must be concrete reasons for making the claim. Since the influence from certain directions is indeed obvious, there is no need to posit other sources without solid evidence. If certain images or technical terms are found in the writings of Rūmī's father or 'Aṭṭār, no one has to look any further, even if the image or term in question was also employed by Ibn al-'Arabī. Appendix I illustrates that in the specific instances where Nicholson claimed that Rūmī drew inspiration from Ibn al-'Arabī, there were more likely sources in Rūmī's immediate environment.

It is not only the lack of any specific evidence that convinces one that Rūmī was free of Ibn al-'Arabī's influence, it is also the deep difference between their perspectives, even if this lies only at what Corbin calls the "superficial" level of form. For example, Rūmī places love at the center of all things, much in the tradition of Aḥmad Ghazālī and Sam'ānī. He expresses the ultimate value of love through verses that constantly manifest the spiritual state of intoxication (*sukr*), though many lines of the *Masnavī* in particular demonstrate an eminent sobriety (*ṣaḥw*). Ibn al-'Arabī and his followers also place an extremely high value on love. Their discussions of the nature of the supreme spiritual realizations achieved by the knowers of God are almost inconceivable without their commenta-

ries on the famous *ḥadīth qudsī*, “My servant keeps drawing near to Me through supererogatory works until I love him; then when I love him, I am his hearing with which he hears, his sight with which he sees, his hand with which he grasps, and his foot with which he walks.” Nevertheless, love does not permeate every line of their writings, as it does with Rūmī. One can imagine Ibn al-ʿArabī without love – in spite of Corbin – but one cannot imagine Rūmī without love.

Another point: Rūmī and Ibn al-ʿArabī directed their works at two completely different audiences. Ibn al-ʿArabī and his followers wrote for the ulama, those with thorough training not only in the Koran, hadith, and jurisprudence, but also in kalam and philosophy. None but the highly learned need apply to study their works. In contrast, Rūmī composed poetry in order to stir up the fire of love in the hearts of his listeners, whoever they might be, whether learned scholars, practitioners of Sufism, or simply the common people. He aimed his poetry at anyone with an understanding of the Persian language and a modicum of spiritual taste (*dhawq*) or a sense of love and beauty. No one meeting these minimal requirements could help but be swept away by the intoxicating power of his lyrics. Rūmī spoke the language of the masses, and much of his “technical” terminology was derived from everyday discourse. No one needed any special educational or intellectual qualifications to appreciate his message.⁷⁸ As a result, Rūmī’s language and teachings are far more universal than Ibn al-ʿArabī’s, in the sense that only a small number of scholars with Sufi training could hope to understand the latter.

To sum up the difference of approach between Rūmī and Ibn al-ʿArabī, I can do no better than relate an anecdote told to me by one of the foremost traditional philosophers of Iran, Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī, himself a devotee of both Ibn al-ʿArabī and Rūmī. One day Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī went to see Rūmī and sat with him at the head of his audience chamber. One of Rūmī’s disciples came forward and asked a question which, to Shaykh Ṣadr al-Dīn, seemed a very difficult one, but Rūmī was able to answer it instantaneously, employing his usual colloquial style. Qūnawī turned to Rūmī and asked, “How are you able to express such difficult and abstruse metaphysics in such simple language?” Rūmī replied, “How are you able to make such simple ideas sound so complicated?”

Like Rūmī, Ibn al-ʿArabī spent much of his time in the divine presence, but his mode of experiencing the divine took a relatively sober and intellectual form, while Rūmī expressed his relationship

with his beloved in the intoxicating imagery of love and rapture.⁷⁹ In short, these two towering spiritual masters personify deeply divergent modes of spirituality that were providentially aimed at different human types, for, as the Sufi saying has it, “There are as many ways to God as there are human souls.” If someone insists on naming the vision that inspired them *waḥdat al-wujūd*, I cannot protest, so long as he or she remembers that Rūmī experienced that vision directly, without historical intermediaries.

Appendix I

Ibn al-ʿArabī “influence” on the *Masnavī*

In translating and explaining the *Masnavī*, Nicholson seems to have paid a good deal of attention to Turkish commentaries (such as those of Ismāʿīl Anqirawī and Sārī ʿAbdallāh) that explain the text in terms of the worldview of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s school, a worldview that has dominated the intellectual expression of Sufism until recent times. Nicholson frequently quotes parallels with Rūmī’s verses in Ibn al-ʿArabī’s writings or explains Rūmī’s concepts in terms of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s teachings, and he claims that Rūmī derived some of his teachings from Ibn al-ʿArabī.

Though Nicholson was familiar with Ibn al-ʿArabī, he paid little or no attention to the great Sufis who wrote in the Persian language before Rūmī, such as Sanāʾī, ʿAṭṭār, Maybūdī, and Samʿānī. Nor did he have at his disposal two of the most important sources for Rūmī’s technical terms and imagery, the *Maʾārif* of Bahāʾ Walad and the *Maqālāt* of Shams-i Tabrīzī. The editors of these two works have indicated a few of the numerous instances where Rūmī was directly inspired by them, while pointing out that the influence is so pervasive that it would be impossible to describe it fully. The recent publication of Samʿānī’s *Rawḥ al-arwāḥ*, a great treasury of Sufi teachings on love, suggests that many of Rūmī’s teachings were already current among Persian Sufis a hundred years earlier, and it is the high quality of Rūmī’s poetry rather than what he has to say that has made him the center of attention. No doubt other Persian works that demonstrate the intellectual content of Persian Sufism prior to Rūmī are still lying in libraries unread, or have simply disappeared.

On several occasions in his commentary on the *Masnavī*, Nicholson asserts or suggests that Rūmī was influenced by Ibn al-ʿArabī, without providing any evidence other than a certain formal resem-

blance. In what follows I list the most important of these instances and propose other far more likely sources for Rūmī's formulations. The numbers refer to the book and verse of the *Masnavī*.

I, 606–10. "Thou didst show the delightfulness of Being unto not-being, [after] thou hadst caused not-being to fall in love with thee ..."

Commentary: "The leading ideas in this passage come from Ibnu 'l-'Arabī, though their provenance is disguised (as usual) by the poetical form in which they are presented ... Ibnu 'l-'Arabī, and Rūmī after him, frequently make use of ... [the term 'not-being' (*adam*, *nīstī*, *nīst*)] to denote things which, though non-existent in one sense, are existent in another."

Note Nicholson's attempt to show that Rūmī is full of borrowings from Ibn al-'Arabī by employing the expression "as usual." One wants to know first of all why Rūmī should have felt it necessary to disguise the provenance of his ideas. Did he fear someone? He certainly could have employed Ibn al-'Arabī's specific technical terms if he had wanted, just as his contemporary 'Irāqī did. The editors of Bahā' Walad's *Ma'ārif* and Shams-i Tabrizī's *Maqālāt* list many instances where Rūmī employs expressions from the works of his predecessors without attempting to hide their provenance. Some of Shams's utterances are far more scandalous than anything Ibn al-'Arabī ever said, but Rūmī does not conceal them; on the contrary, he sometimes tries to top them.

Rūmī constantly meditates upon the relationship between existence and nonexistence. How could it be otherwise, given the profundity of his thought? The basic idea of this whole passage can easily be taken back to the repeated Koranic assertion that when God wants to bring a thing into existence, He says to it "Be!" and then it is. Where is the thing before God says to it "Be" if not "non-existent in one sense ... existent in another"? It is true that Ibn al-'Arabī often employs the terms "being" and "not-being," but so do numerous other figures with whom Rūmī was familiar, such as Bahā' Walad, Shams, 'Aṭṭār, and Abū Ḥāmid Ghazālī, as well as others whom he probably knew, like Aḥmad Ghazālī and 'Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadānī.⁸⁰ Or take these typical passages from Sam'anī: "Your existence is like nonexistence, and your nonexistence like existence" (*Rawḥ al-arwāḥ*, p. 32). "Consider all existent things nonexistent in themselves and count all nonexistent things existent through His power" (*ibid.*, p. 304).

I, 1112. "Reason is hidden, and [only] a world [of phenomena] is visible: our forms are the waves or a spray of it [of that hidden ocean]."

Commentary: "Underlying all individualized forms of being is the Unconditioned Divine Essence. This verse states concisely the doctrine of pantheistic monism (*waḥdatu 'l-wujūd*) in the form in which Rūmī may have heard it enunciated by Ṣadru'ddīn of Qóniyah, a pupil of Ibnu 'l-'Arabī."

The verse expresses the relationship between the inward (*bāṭin*) and outward (*ẓāhir*), or the meaning (*ma'nā*) and the form (*ṣūra*), a doctrine that is fundamental to all Rūmī's teachings. It is prefigured in the Koran and was perceived therein by spiritual teachers, Sufis, and philosophers from the earliest times. Neither Ibn al-'Arabī nor Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī – nor Rūmī, for that matter – ever identify Reason or Intellect (*aql*) with the Divine Essence. Rūmī often refers to Intellect in the sense employed in this verse as '*aql-i kull*, the "Universal Intellect," whereas Ibn al-'Arabī is far more likely to employ the term *al-'aql al-awwal*, the "First Intellect." Ibn al-'Arabī sometimes considers the First Intellect as the source of the forms in this world, but the idea is not central to his teachings, since he most often identifies the forms of the universe with the self-disclosures or loci or manifestation of *wujūd*.

A century before Ibn al-'Arabī, Sanā'ī devoted sections of *Ḥadiqat al-ḥaqā'iq* and *Sayr al-'ibād* to '*aql* (often employing the synonymous Persian term *khirad*), mentioning Intellect's cosmological function and employing the term '*aql-i kull* in the process. For example,

Every good and evil under the heavens picks fruit from the stock of Intellect ...

The bench of the Universal Intellect stands beneath the All.⁸¹

The imagery of the ocean and the spray is common. Bahā' Walad writes, "The waves rose up from the Ocean of Nonexistence, throwing the foam, the debris, and the shells – the forms – and the pearls – the meanings – upon the shore."⁸²

I, 1133. "Therefore thou knewest light by its opposite: opposite reveals opposite in [the process of] coming forth."

Commentary: "Characteristically the poet throughout this passage combines ideas derived from Plotinus with Ibnu 'l-'Arabī's view that God and the world are related to each other as the inward aspect (*bāṭin*) and the outward aspect (*ẓāhir*) of Being."

As I have noted elsewhere, the word Nicholson renders as "[in the

process of] coming forth" (*ṣudūr*) should probably be understood not as a *maṣḍar* but as the plural of *ṣadr*, "breast," which accords more with the colloquial language and Rūmī's point.⁸³ Nicholson read *ṣudūr*, a technical term in philosophy, so that he could point to an "influence" and bring in Neoplatonism. Even if we accept Nicholson's unlikely reading, it shows only that Rūmī was familiar with philosophical language, which no one doubts in any case.

The word "characteristically" in Nicholson's commentary plays the same role as the expression "as usual" in the first passage quoted above. In spite of the claim that this borrowing is "characteristic" and "usual," Nicholson provides no concrete evidence whatsoever that Ibn al-'Arabī is the direct or indirect source of any of Rūmī's ideas. The relationship between the terms *bāṭin* and *ẓāhir* and their centrality to Sufi thought was mentioned above.

I, 1736. "All kings are enslaved to their slaves, all people are dead [ready to die] for one who dies for them."

Commentary: "These verses give a poetical form to the doctrine, with which students of Ibnu 'l-'Arabī are familiar, that correlative terms . . . are merely names for different aspects of the same reality."

Here at least Nicholson does not claim explicitly that Rūmī has derived these ideas from Ibn al-'Arabī. The importance of correlation and opposites for Islamic thought in general is obvious to anyone who has read the Koran with care, and it reappears in all sorts of connections throughout Islamic intellectual history.⁸⁴ Nicholson sees in these verses a kind of ontological statement, as is usually the case with similar statements in Ibn al-'Arabī. However, as Nicholson implies in the remainder of his commentary on this verse, Rūmī makes such statements in the light of his own experiences of love – and no one could claim that he did not know love in all its intricacies. Compare the underlying idea of this passage with Rūmī's statement, "One cannot conceive of the sound of one hand clapping . . . *He loves them* is never separate from *they love Him*, nor is *God is well-pleased with them* ever without *they are well-pleased with Him* [Koran 5:119]."⁸⁵

These few passages are the significant instances where Nicholson states or implies an influence from Ibn al-'Arabī. They are scant evidence indeed for the oft-repeated statement that Rūmī was Ibn al-'Arabī's student or follower.

Appendix II

Ibn al-'Arabī's influence on 'Aṭṭār (!)

In order to demonstrate the weakness of Nicholson's arguments to prove that Ibn al-'Arabī influenced Rūmī, I would like to show how easy it is to draw the type of parallels that Nicholson provides as evidence. I hope thereby to "prove" that 'Aṭṭār was influenced by Ibn al-'Arabī, even though no one has ever suggested this, especially since 'Aṭṭār had died long before Ibn al-'Arabī wrote his influential works, the *Futūḥāt* and the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*.

I quote a few verses from one of 'Aṭṭār's qasidas;⁸⁶ similar verses are plentiful in his writings. In order to think that 'Aṭṭār was deeply influenced by Ibn al-'Arabī, we only have to accept, as Nicholson does concerning Rūmī, that in each passage "The leading ideas . . . come from Ibnu 'l-'Arabī though their provenance is disguised (as usual) by the poetical form in which they are presented."

Oh You who have veiled Your face
and come into the bazaar,
A whole creation has been seized
by this talisman!

Though nonmanifest and incomparable in Himself, God has become manifest and similar through creation. However, He is manifest as "other," so we do not perceive Him and remain ignorant of His presence. "People are veiled from the Real through the Real, because the Real is so clearly visible" (*Futūḥāt*, II, p. 85.17). "This present world is the locus of the Veil, except in the case of the gnostics" (*ibid.*, II, p. 654.4). "Nothing exists but veils let down; the objects of perception are the veils" (*ibid.*, III, p. 214.25).

Everything other than You
is a mirage and a display,
for neither little
nor much has come [into the "other"].

Everything other than the divine essence is what Ibn al-'Arabī calls "imagination" (note that Nasafī, in the passage quoted above, considers "imagination" (*khayāl*) synonymous with "display" (*namāyish*)). Nothing has "gone out" of God to enter into *wujūd*, since *wujūd* is God Himself and does not change. The appearances we perceive in *wujūd* are simply the properties of the entities, which remain forever nonexistent. "Everything other than the Essence of

the Real is intervening imagination and vanishing shadow" (ibid., II, p. 313.17).

Here unificationism is unbelief,
and so also incarnationism,
for this is oneness,
but it has come in repetition [*takrār*]!

'Aṭṭar first points out, as Ibn al-'Arabī's followers often do, that *waḥdat al-wujūd* is totally different from the heresies *ittiḥād* and *ḥulūl*. The verse as a whole provides a concise statement of Ibn al-'Arabī's doctrine of continuous creation, the fact that "self-disclosure never repeats itself." "There is no repetition whatsoever in *wujūd*, because of the divine vastness" (ibid., II, p. 302.18). The idea that the "One" produces manyness through repeating itself is a common theme in Ibn al-'Arabī's writings. The cosmos is nothing but a collection of "ones," since one times one equals one. "There is nothing in *wujūd* except God. Though the Entity is many in witnessing (*shuhūd*), it is one in *wujūd*. To multiply one by one is to multiply a thing by itself, so it yields nothing but its own kind" (ibid., IV, p. 357.2).

There is one Maker, while His handiworks
are thousands of thousands!
Everything has come into manifestation
from the ready cash of knowledge.

The objects of the divine knowledge – the immutable entities – are like God's ready cash, since they are ever-present with Him. "God knows the cosmos in the state of its nonexistence, and He gives it existence according to its form in His Knowledge" (ibid., I, p. 90–26).

The Ocean produced the "other"
with its own waves –
a cloud identical with the drop
has come into the bazaar.

Things are "other than God" only in respect of their appearance of independence, not in respect of *wujūd*. "In reality, there is no 'other,' except the entities of the possible things in respect of their immutability, not in respect of their *wujūd*" (ibid., II, p. 10.13). "In reality the 'other' is immutable/not immutable, He/not He" (ibid., II, p. 501–4).

This has an exact analogy
in the sun: Its reflection
fills the two worlds
with light.

Like others, Ibn al-'Arabī associates *wujūd* and light, since each can be defined as that which is manifest in itself and makes others manifest. "There is nothing stronger than light, since it possesses manifestation and through it manifestation takes place, while all things are in utter need of manifestation, and without light no manifestation takes place" (ibid., II, p. 466.20).

The harmonious Entity,
other than whom not an atom exists,
became manifest; only then
did all these "others" come to be.

A reflection showed itself
from beneath the veil of Oneness,
entering into a hundred thousand
veils of imagination.

These lines repeat what was said earlier, employing different imagery. In short, things in the universe are but the manifestation of real *wujūd* in a multiplicity of forms.

He manifested to Himself
the mystery of self-breathing –
eighteen thousand worlds of mystery
came into being.

Ibn al-'Arabī also speaks of the "eighteen thousand" worlds created by God. The expression "self-breathing" (*khwud-damī*) alludes to what Ibn al-'Arabī calls the "Breath of the All-merciful" (*nafas al-raḥmān*), the Supreme Barzakh standing between God and the cosmos. The Breath is both identical to God ("manifest to Himself") and the locus within which the cosmos becomes manifest (the "eighteen thousand worlds"). The "mystery" has to do with the fact that the worlds are neither God nor other than God; they are "He/not He." "Through God's words 'Be!' . . . the entities become manifest within the Breath of the All-merciful, just as words become manifest within the human breath" (ibid., II, p. 401.29).

He shone one ray of His light,
and the world was filled with lamps;
He planted one seed,
and all these fruits grew up!

In the Garden of Love
the One Unity flashed forth:
Branches, trees, petals, thorns –
all began to bloom!

Both these lines provide images to illustrate the oneness of *wujūd* in itself and the manyness of its manifestations.

Disclosing Yourself to Yourself
is Your work,
in order that a hundred thousand works
may spring forth from one work!

By the word "disclosing" (*jilwa*) 'Aṭṭār alludes to the oft-quoted statement in Ibn al-'Arabī's school, "He disclosed Himself to Himself in Himself" (*tajallā li-dhātihi fī dhātihi*).

O You whose manifest side is lover
and whose nonmanifest side is Beloved!
Who has ever seen the sought
become the seeker?

Those who love God are themselves nothing but loci of manifestation of His properties, so in effect God loves Himself. "There is no lover and no beloved except God, since there is nothing in *wujūd* except the Divine Presence, that is, His Essence, His attributes, and His acts" (ibid., II, p. 114.14). "He is the lover and the beloved, the seeker and the sought" (ibid., II, p. 331.18).

Who is that, and from whence
had He displayed Himself?
What is that, and what is this,
that have come into manifestation?

At the highest state of knowledge the gnostic is bewildered by both God and the cosmos. Is the cosmos God, or is it other than God? "You say, it is creation, but in itself it is neither the Real, nor other than the Real . . . The elect . . . sometimes say, 'We are we and He is He,' sometimes, 'He is we and we are He,' and sometimes, 'We are not purely we and He is not purely He.' . . . So knowledge of the Real is bewilderment, and knowledge of creation is bewilderment" (ibid., IV, p. 279.3).

NOTES

- 1 For example, N. Pūrjawādī ascribes a belief in *waḥdat al-wujūd* to Aḥmad Ghazālī, the brother of the more famous Abū Ḥāmid Ghazālī. See his *Sultān-i Ṭarīqat* (Tehran, 1358/1979), pp. 104ff.
- 2 Cf. W. C. Chittick, *A Shī'ite Anthology* (Albany, 1981), pp. 37–38.
- 3 Abū Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī (d. c. 442/1051), the famous philosopher-scientist, summarizes a view that sounds very much like *waḥdat al-wujūd* while explaining the doctrines of the Greek philosophers; then he points

out that this is also the position of the Sufis: "Some of them held that only the First Cause possesses true *wujūd*, since the First Cause is independent in its *wujūd* by its very Essence, while everything else has need of it. Moreover, the *wujūd* of that which is utterly in need of something else in order to possess *wujūd* is like imagination (*khayāl*); it is not real (*ḥaqq*). The Real is only the One, the First. This is also the opinion of the Sufis." *Kitāb fī taḥqīq mā li l-hind* (Hyderabad, Deccan, 1958), p. 24; cf. E. C. Sachau, *Alberuni's India* (Delhi, 1964), p. 33. For relevant statements by Sufis in the context of *tawḥīd*, see the short but rich study by R. Gramlich, "Mystical Dimensions of Islamic Monotheism," in A. Schimmel and A. Falaturi, eds., *We Believe in One God* (New York, 1979), pp. 136–148. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.

- 4 Quoted by 'Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, p. 256, in 'A. 'Usayrān, ed., *Muṣannafāt-i 'Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī* (Tehran, 1341/1962); and by 'Azīz al-Dīn Nasafī, *Maqṣad-i aqṣā*, appended to Jāmī, *Ashī'at al-lama'āt*, ed. Ḥ. Rabbānī (Tehran, 1352/1973), p. 272.
- 5 See 'Ayn al-Quḍāt, *Tamhīdāt*, pp. 256–257.
- 6 Anṣārī, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, ed. 'A. Ḥabībī (Kabul, 1341/1962), pp. 180, 172, and 174; also quoted in J. Nūrbakhsh, *Ma'ārif-i ṣūfiyya* (London, 1983), I, pp. 112, 113, and 118.
- 7 al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt al-anwār*, ed. A. 'Afīfī (Cairo, 1964), p. 55. Cf. *Al-Ghazzālī's Mishkat al-Anwar*, trans. W. H. T. Gairdner (Lahore, 1952), p. 104.
- 8 al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* (Cairo, 1326/1908), IV, p. 230 (book IV, part 6, section 8).
- 9 H. Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Ṣūfism of Ibn 'Arabī* (Princeton, 1969); T. Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism* (Tokyo, 1983); M. Chodkiewicz, *Le sceau des saints* (Paris, 1986). If one reads all three of these books, which are written from widely divergent standpoints, one will begin to have an idea of the complexity of Ibn al-'Arabī's thought.
- 10 James Morris, "Ibn al-'Arabī and His Interpreters: Recent French Translations," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 106 (1986), 539–551, 733–756; and 107 (1987), 101–119 (quotation from p. 540, n. 4). Morris's article, especially part 1, is a fine study of the factors that make Ibn al-'Arabī so difficult.
- 11 Cf. S. al-Ḥakīm, *al-Mu'jam al-ṣūfī* (Beirut, 1981), p. 1145; M. Chodkiewicz, *Épître sur l'Unité Absolue* (Paris, 1982), pp. 25–26; I. Madkūr, ed., in *al-Kitāb al-Tidhkārī: Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-'Arabī*, idem (Cairo, 1969), p. 369. It is of course possible that the term will one day turn up in some newly discovered manuscript of one of Ibn al-'Arabī's works, but even if that happens, it will probably not have a technical significance in the context.
- 12 Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* (Beirut, n.d.), II, p. 517.2.
- 13 Ibid., II, p. 519.12.
- 14 Ibid., I, p. 307.2.

- 15 Ibn al-'Arabī, *Kitāb al-jalāla*, p. 9, in *Rasā'il Ibn al-'Arabī* (Hyderabad, Deccan, 1948).
- 16 If one had to choose a single principle in Ibn al-'Arabī's thought that synthesizes all his teachings, the best choice would probably be *al-insān al-kāmil*, "Perfect Man." See R. W. J. Austin, *Ibn Al-'Arabī, The Bezels of Wisdom* (New York, 1980), pp. 34–35.
- 17 Rūmī, *Dīwān*, 21574–76, cited in W. C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi* (Albany, 1983), p. 279.
- 18 Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism*, p. 81.
- 19 For a few examples of the term, cf. W. C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabī's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany, 1989), index, under "unveiling."
- 20 Cf. M. Molé, *Les Mystiques musulmans* (Paris, 1965), pp. 59–61; A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill, 1975), p. 267.
- 21 Cf. Austin, *Ibn Al-'Arabī, The Bezels of Wisdom*, p. 26.
- 22 Ibn al-'Arabī also employs the term *wujūd* to refer to the "Breath of the All-merciful," the supreme *barzakh* or "isthmus" that is neither God nor creation, nor different from the two. In order to keep the discussion as simple as possible, I will leave this "third thing" (*al-shay' al-thālith*) out of the picture, even though ultimately, it is the integrating factor. See Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, ch. 8.
- 23 Cf. Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, pp. 83–88.
- 24 For example, "There is nothing in *wujūd* but the One/Many" (Ibn al-'Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, III, p. 420.15). See Ḥakīm, *Mu'jam*, pp. 1162–1164.
- 25 This formula is found already in Anṣārī; see his *Intimate Conversations* (published along with *Ibn 'Ata'illah: The Book of Wisdom*), trans. W. Thackston (New York, 1978), p. 215. See also Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, pp. 147, 274, 283, 362, 376.
- 26 Ibn al-'Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, III, p. 151.26. For the passage in its context, see Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 368.
- 27 Cf. W. C. Chittick, "Mysticism versus Philosophy in Earlier Islamic History: The al-Ṭūsī, al-Qūnawī Correspondence," *Religious Studies*, 17 (1981), 87–104.
- 28 As Chodkiewicz remarks (*Epître sur l'Unicité Absolue*, p. 26), Qūnawī "a donné à doctrine de son maître une formulation philosophique sans doute nécessaire mais dont le systématisme a engendré bien des malentendus."
- 29 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū'at al-rasā'il wa l-masā'il*, ed. Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (n.p., n.d.), I, p. 176.
- 30 Qūnawī, *Miftāḥ al-ghayb*, published on the margin of its commentary, *Miftāḥ al-ins* by Fanārī (Tehran, 1323/1905), pp. 52–69. Qūnawī quotes the same passage as one of the "greatest of the texts" he has ever written in *al-Nuṣūṣ*, ed. S. J. Āshtiyānī (Tehran, 1362/1983), pp. 69–74; also appended to 'Abd al-Razzāq Kāshānī, *Sharḥ manāzil al-sā'irīn* (Tehran, 1315/1897–1898), pp. 294–295; also appended to Ibn Turka, *Tamhīd al-qawā'id* (Tehran, 1316/1898–1899), pp. 209–10.

- 31 Qūnawī, *al-Nafaḥāt al-ilāhiyya* (Tehran, 1316/1898–1899), p. 279. The term "tasks" is derived from the Koran, Sura 55:29: "Each day He is upon some task." Cf. Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, pp. 98–99.
- 32 Qūnawī, *al-Nafaḥāt*, pp. 273–274.
- 33 Qūnawī, *Miftāḥ al-ghayb*, p. 176.
- 34 The term is not mentioned in Jandī's 125-page explanation of Ibn al-'Arabī's introduction to the *Fuṣūṣ* (*Sharḥ fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ed. S. J. Āshtiyānī (Mashhad, 1361/1982), nor in his Persian *Nafḥat al-ruh*, ed. N. Māyil Hirawī (Tehran, 1362/1983). Jandī's commentary was especially influential, even though it was preceded by at least two others, because it was the first to explain the whole text. The most important of the earlier commentaries are probably *al-Fukūk* by Qūnawī, which explains the meanings of the chapter headings, and one by 'Alīf al-Dīn Tilimsānī, which, however, often ignores whole chapters and deals mainly with a few points on which the author disagrees with Ibn al-'Arabī.
- 35 Jandī, *Sharḥ fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, p. 386, 388.
- 36 Jāmī, *Nafaḥāt al-uns*, ed. M. Tawḥīdīpur (Tehran, 1336/1957), p. 559.
- 37 Farghānī, *Mashāriq al-darārī*, ed. S. J. Āshtiyānī (Mashhad, 1398/1978), pp. 5–6.
- 38 Cf. *ibid.*, index. Instances of its usage in *Muntaha l-madārik* (Cairo, 1293/1876), include I, 101–102, 226; II, pp. 202, 217.
- 39 Qūnawī makes the same point in many long passages and without contrasting these two specific terms, but sometimes he expresses the idea even more succinctly, as in the statement, "Know that distinction (*tamyīz*) pertains to knowledge, while *tawḥīd* pertains to *wujūd*." *al-Tafsīr al-ṣūfī li l-Qu'ān*, ed. 'A. A. 'Aṭā' (Cairo, 1969), p. 455; also *I'jāz al-bayān fī tafsīr umm al-Qur'ān* (Hyderabad, Deccan, 1949), p. 333.
- 40 In this context Farghānī draws a horizontal distinction between *waḥdat al-wujūd* and the manyness of knowledge. In other words, these two principles lie on the same plane, and their duality is overcome only on a higher level, which is called *aḥadiyyat al-jam'*, the "Unity of All-Comprehensiveness." Farghānī writes (*Mashāriq*, p. 344), "*Waḥdat al-wujūd* and the manyness of knowledge are identical with each other at the level of the Unity of All-Comprehensiveness," while "these two realities must be actualized and differentiated at the level of Divinity."
- 41 *Ibid.*, p. 345.
- 42 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 359, 365, 395–396; Farghānī, *Muntaha*, I, pp. 101–102, 226.
- 43 In detailed notes that I took on manuscripts of Tilimsānī's *Sharḥ al-fuṣūṣ* and *Sharḥ al-asmā' al-ḥusnā* in 1979, I find no mention of the term *waḥdat al-wujūd*.
- 44 Cf. *Encyclopedia of Islam* (new edition), II, pp. 921–922.
- 45 However, Ibn al-'Arabī figures in the *isnād* of Ibn Sab'īn's *ṭarīqa* provided by his disciple Shushtarī; see Chodkiewicz, *Epître*, pp. 36–37.

- 46 *Rasā'il Ibn Sab'īn*, ed. 'A. Badawī (Cairo, 1965), p. 194. For other instances of the term, see *ibid.*, pp. 38, 189, 264, 266.
- 47 See Chodkiewicz's important study and translation, *Epître sur l'Unité Absolue*.
- 48 Ibn al-'Arabī [Balyānī], "*Whoso Knoweth Himself . . .*," trans. T. H. Weir (London, 1976), p. 4.
- 49 Jāmī gives examples of his poetry in *Nafahāt al-uns*, p. 262.
- 50 Cf. the introduction to Ḥammūya's *al-Miṣbāḥ fi l-taṣawwuf*, ed. N. Māyil Harawī (Tehran, 1362/1983); M. Molé, introduction to Nasafī, *Kitāb al-insān al-kāmil* (Tehran, 1962), p. 8.
- 51 Jāmī, *Nafahāt al-uns*, p. 429.
- 52 Nasafī, *Kashf al-ḥaqā'iq*, ed. A. Mahdawī Dāmghānī (Tehran, 1344/1965), p. 153. Immediately following this quotation, Nasafī begins discussing the "words of the people of oneness." Ibn al-'Arabī sometimes employs the expression, "There is no existent but God," or states that "There is no existent other than He". See Ibn al-'Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, 216.3, 563.31.
- 53 Nasafī employs the term twice as part of headings (pp. 154, 159) and once in the text (p. 159) of *Kashf al-ḥaqā'iq*. He also uses the term *waḥdat-i wājib al-wujūd* once (p. 152).
- 54 Ibn Khaldūn employs the synonymous expression *aṣḥāb al-waḥda*, mentioning among others Ibn Sab'īn and Shushtarī; he contrasts this group with the *aṣḥāb al-tajallī wa l-mazāhir wa l-ḥaqārāt*, and mentions Ibn al-Fāriḍ, Ibn al-'Arabī, and others. See Ibn Khaldūn, *Shifā' al-sā'il li-taḥdhīb al-masā'il*, ed. I. S. Khalife (Beirut, 1959), pp. 51–52; cf. *idem*. *The Muqaddima*, trans. F. Rosenthal (Princeton, 1967), III, p. 89.
- 55 Nasafī, *Kashf al-ḥaqā'iq*, p. 155 and *Maqṣad-i aqṣā*, 252; Ḥammūya, *al-Miṣbāḥ fi l-taṣawwuf*, p. 66. That "everything other than God" is "imagination" constitutes one of Ibn al-'Arabī's central ideas, though, as in his affirmation of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, this statement is not as simple and straightforward as it might appear. Cf. Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, ch. 7.
- 56 See, for example, M. U. Memon, *Ibn Taimiyya's Struggle Against Popular Religion* (The Hague, 1976), especially pp. 29–46. Though Memon tries to be fair, he severely distorts Ibn al-'Arabī's teachings by relying largely on Ibn Taymiyya's own accounts and outdated Western studies.
- 57 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū'a*, I, pp. 61–120; IV, pp. 2–101.
- 58 For example, *ibid.*, I, pp. 66, 68, 69, 76, 78.
- 59 Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqī, one of Qūnawī's outstanding disciples, provides a succinct definition of unificationism in his *Lamā'āt*. See W. C. Chittick and P. L. Wilson, *Fakhruddin 'Iraqi: Divine Flashes* (New York, 1982), pp. 93, 145–46; cf. Farghānī, *Mashāriq*, pp. 271–73; *idem*, *Muntaha*, I, pp. 292–93; Ibn al-'Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, pp. 130.11, 334.7; III, p. 37.13.
- 60 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū'a*, IV, p. 73.
- 61 *Ibid.*, I, p. 66.

- 62 *Ibid.*, IV, p. 4; for a more detailed summary, see p. 53.
- 63 I was able to find one instance in Qaysarī's long theoretical introduction to his commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ*: "The truth of these words is only disclosed to that person to whom the reality of Activity (*al-fa'āliyya*) becomes manifest and to whom *waḥdat al-wujūd* becomes manifest within the levels of witnessing (*shuhūd*)." Note the close connection between *wujūd* and *shuhūd* (*Sharḥ fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* [Tehran, 1299/1882], p. 29; also S. J. Āshtiyānī, *Sharḥ-i muqaddima-yi Qaysarī* [Mashhad, 1385/1965], p. 291).
- 64 Qaysarī, *Rasā'il*, ed. S. J. Āshtiyānī (Mashhad, 1357/1978), p. 50.
- 65 Cf. Jami, *Naqd al-nuṣūṣ fī sharḥ naqsh al-fuṣūṣ*, ed. W. C. Chittick (Tehran, 1977), pp. 18–19. See also N. L. Heer, *The Precious Pearl: Al-Jami's al-Durrat al-Fakhira* (Albany, 1979), pp. 36, 43, 65, 92.
- 66 James Morris, remarking on Asin Palacios's study of Ibn al-'Arabī, *L'Islam christianisé*, in "Ibn al-'Arabī and His Interpreters," Part I, p. 544. Cf. Corbin's eloquent appraisal of Ibn al-'Arabī's importance and the dangers of various oversimplified interpretations in his *Creative Imagination*. Cf. also T. Burckhardt, *An Introduction to Sufi Doctrine* (Lahore, 1959), pp. 23–26; S. H. Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages* (Cambridge, 1964), pp. 104–106.
- 67 On Sirhindi and *waḥdat al-shuhūd*, see Y. Friedmann, *Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi: An Outline of His Thought and a Study of His Image in the Eyes of Posterity* (Montreal, 1971). Friedmann's comparison of *waḥdat al-shuhūd* with *waḥdat al-wujūd* follows Sirhindi's own interpretation, so it has no validity in terms of what Ibn al-'Arabī and his followers actually said. The debate between the supporters of *waḥdat al-wujūd* and *waḥdat al-shuhūd* is said to go back to 'Alā' al-Dawla Simnānī (d. 736/1336), who exchanged well-known letters with the *Fuṣūṣ* commentator 'Abd al-Razzāq Kāshānī, but 'Alā' al-Dawla himself does not employ the terms, nor is it known who first contrasted them. Cf. H. Landolt, "Der Briefwechsel zwischen Kāshānī und Simnānī über *Waḥdat al-wuḡūd*," *Der Islam*, 50 (1973), 29–81.
- 68 Molé, *Les Mystiques musulmans*, p. 109.
- 69 This is not the place to attempt to show the error of this attribution, since to do so in the limited space available would force me to indulge in the same sort of oversimplifications that I am criticizing. Let me only remark that no one paints a more dynamic picture of creation and the human relationship to God than Ibn al-'Arabī. For example, when he explains the similarity demanded by God's self-disclosure (*tajallī*), he constantly quotes the axiom, "Self-disclosure never repeats itself" (*lā takrār fi l-tajallī*), which is the principle behind his well-known doctrine of the "renewal of creation at each instant" (*tajdīd al-khalq ma'a l-ānāt*). One of the names that Ibn al-'Arabī gives to the highest stage of spiritual realization, where the human receptacle becomes the full manifestation of the all-comprehensive divine name Allah, is "bewilderment" (*ḥayra*), since within this station the perfect human being constantly witnesses